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# IMAGES OF LABOUR DAY

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# Awareness of the Asian holocaust



by David Owen

Anthony Faiola in his newspaper article “Tokyo Teacher is Punished for Pacifist Stance” documents the disturbing resurgence of Japanese nationalism (*Washington Post*, Aug 30 2005). Local authorities have ratcheted up punishments for teachers like Kimiko Nezu who refused to stand for the World War II hymn, “Kimigayo,” at her school’s graduation ceremony. The school board suspended her for one month for her protest against the song which Japan’s Parliament declared the national anthem in 1999. Next time, they warn, they will fire this

coats, performed vivisection on live Chinese victims of their germ warfare. Japanese planes had dropped canisters of bubonic plague on villages in the area so that the doctors could test the efficiency of their germs. We heard testimony from victims of anthrax and glanders, both animal diseases which can be contracted by humans, which were spread in the water systems by Japanese soldiers and their prisoners of war (POW) agents through hundreds of Chinese villages.

In the Nanjing memorial we saw great sections of earth densely packed with uninterred bones of victims, many bearing deep sword wounds from the massacre which claimed 300,000



**Found in the “Resistance Museum” this diorama, which in the photo looks like a painting, depicts an action of the PLA - with the red flag - in the successful ‘Hundred Regiments Offensive’.**

pacifist who has taught for 34 years. The object of Nezu’s distaste was the song under which Imperial troops marched to establish the Japanese emperor’s eternal reign by bringing unparalleled suffering in the Asian holocaust which claimed 30 million victims, most of them Chinese, from 1931-1945 (Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of WWII*. 1997).

It was my honour to be part of ALPHA’s (The Association of Learning and Preserving the History of World War II in Asia) second Peace and Reconciliation Tour this past summer. Twenty Canadian teachers followed a part of the Japanese imperial path of destruction, more than 60 years removed and the barbarity still shocked and unnerved us.

## Japanese war crimes

Talking in a Buddhist temple near a thriving commercial centre, the renowned Asian holocaust-survivor advocate, Madame Wang Xiang, described how Japanese doctors, dressed in their white

victims in five weeks during December and January 1937-38 — a record for cruelty unmatched even by Japan’s ally, Nazi Germany (Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of WWII*. 1997).

We listened with disgust to the accounts Professor Su of Shanghai University gave of the imperial organization of hundreds of sex slave houses in which the army entrapped 400,000 conquered women to service the two million Japanese troops stationed in China. In subdued silence we heard Madame Xian, one of these women who is permanently traumatized by her experience, give us small snippets of the horror she lived in one of these “comfort stations.”

## Loot all, burn all, kill all

In Beijing’s Museum of the War of Resistance Against the Japanese Invasion, we saw a diorama depicting a victorious Communist 8<sup>th</sup> Route Army action against Japanese forces. In July

# engenders new school curriculum

1941, in reaction to the Red Army's successes, the Japanese adopted the notorious "three all policy" – loot all, burn all, kill all – in order to reduce the population in North China from 44 million to 25 million. This brutal policy only intensified armed resistance which helped bring the Japanese fascist nightmare to an end in 1945 (Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse Tung*, 1968: 219).

On the last day of the tour we met with Madame Attorney Kang Jian and learned the futility of trying to use international law as a weapon to exact compensation from the Japanese government. In 1951, over the objections of virtually all the other Asian countries victimized by Japan, the American government under John Foster Dulles's orchestration, forced the signing of the San Francisco Treaty which settled World War II in the Pacific and allowed the Japanese government to pay virtually no compensation to the millions of their victims.

## Struggle for compensation

Madame Wang Xuan is a folk hero in China for the strength of her efforts to win compensation for the survivors of the Chinese holocaust. She comes from a village that was hit by the infamous Japanese Biological Warfare Unit (JBWU) 731. She led the fight for compensation for JBWU victims by using Japanese Civil law as the arena for justice. In the 10 years of their fight there have been some symbolic victories in which Japanese courts have agreed to the victims' version of events. However, the government and the Japanese corporations they sue will grant little else.

In a related civil suit for compensation for 10 plaintiff survivors of slave labour practices, the Niigata district court, in March 2004 in a ground breaking decision, ruled in their favour against the government and Rinko corporation granting them \$830,000. Unfortunately the defendants have appealed the decision to the Tokyo supreme court and have put forth a motion to the court to disallow the Chinese lawyer Madame Kang standing as an expert to work to help the plaintiffs during their court appearances.<sup>1</sup>

## No more whitewashing of history

A major concern for Asian countries outside Japan is the whitewashing of this sordid history (World War II in the Pacific) in the country's high school texts. In Beijing, our last stop of the tour, we met with historians Rong Wei Mu and Bu Ping. Both were part of a writing team of 50 Chinese teachers, who together with an equal number of Korean and Japanese historians produced a common high school history of Asia Pacific for the period each with the same text written in the three different languages. The English version of this book is *The Holocaust* has been front and centre in North American and European mass consciousness for decades but the Asian holocaust which claimed 35 million victims from 1931-45 barely hits the radar screen in the West. Part of ALPHA's mandate is to help reverse this trend, and one way is through the slow and steady work of curriculum adaptation to open up to North American high school students this hidden part of modern world history.

## Cross-cultural curriculum experience

For three weeks last semester (Spring 2005), I used the BC curriculum guide entitled *Human Rights in the Asia Pacific* with my two Gr. 12 law classes in the course's last part on "International

Law." I started with the short video titled *May and August* which depicts the life of two Chinese youngsters during the Nanking massacre to give students a quick introduction to the topic. This film can be purchased through ALPHA. I then followed the guide from its introductory history background lesson right through to its culminating mock tribunal exercise. It is handout No. 1.1 titled *War Crimes and International Law* which gives an extensive six-page summary of international law and how it applies to the



**Madame Wang Xuan with the mike stands in front of a blackboard map outline of Chong Shan village (her home) which shows where the Japanese dropped the bubonic plague.**

Asian holocaust was the guide's most critical section. It was essential for students who role-played the Defense, Prosecution and the Judges for what was the highlight of the unit—the mock tribunal trying Japanese war-crimes.

Although I haven't seen it, I've been told Toronto ALPHA's resource guide, which will be released in a press conference at Jarvis Collegiate on September 22 at 2:30 pm, will have a tribunal as its culminating activity as well. If Mesdames Wang Xuan, Kang Jian as well as Professor Su, a spokesperson for the Asian holocaust's sex slaves, continue their strong advocacy in Japanese courts perhaps future curriculum guides will detail their victories in the battle for justice in this hidden part of world history.

<sup>1</sup> At press time it is unknown whether or not Madame Kang will be allowed to continue as an expert assistant to help the Chinese plaintiffs.

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